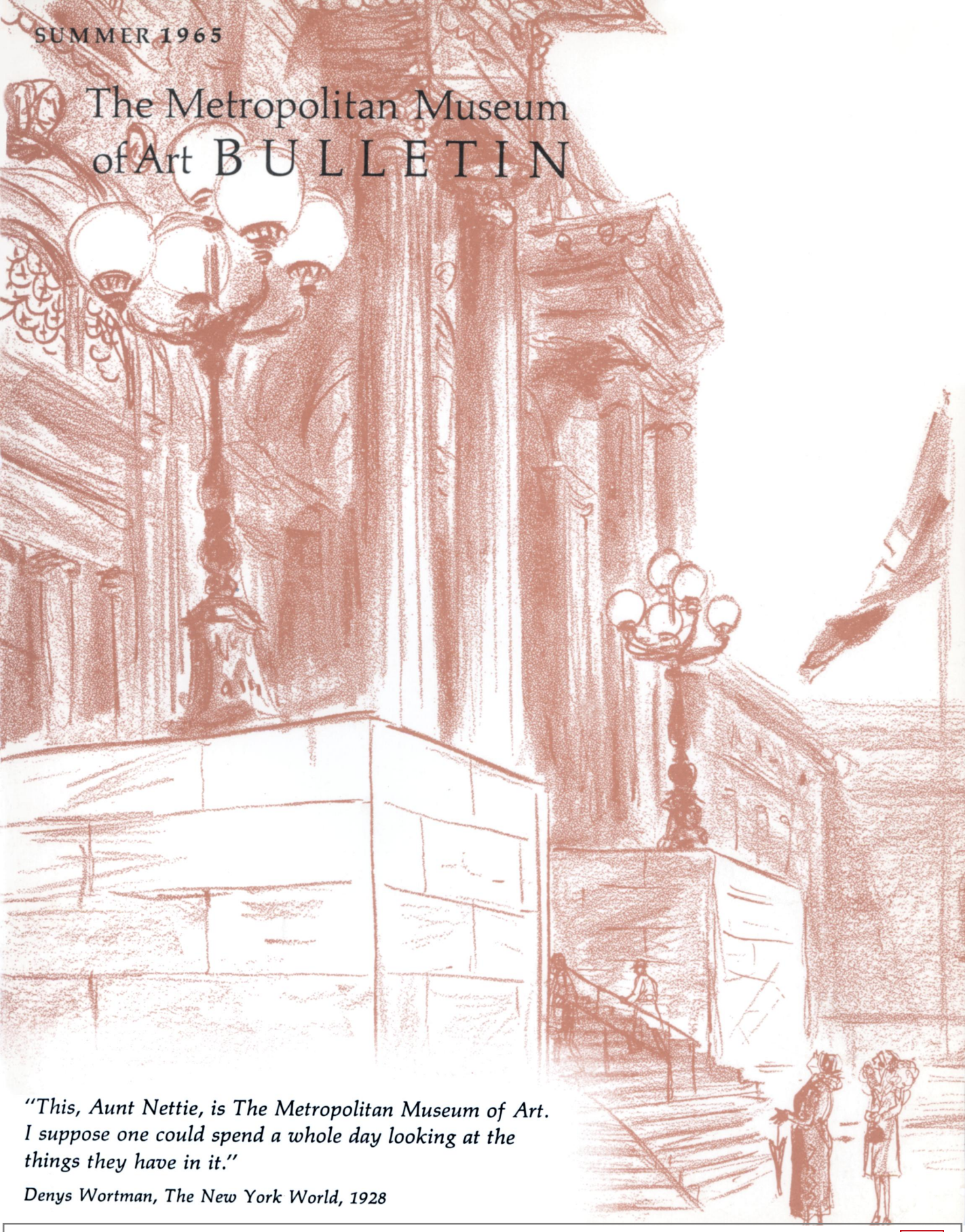
SUMMER 1965

The Metropolitan Museum of Art BULLETIN



"This, Aunt Nettie, is The Metropolitan Museum of Art. I suppose one could spend a whole day looking at the things they have in it."

Denys Wortman, The New York World, 1928

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View of the Museum from the Cesnola galleries in 1882

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Avoiding the popular "Wolfe collection," whose anecdotic canvases filled one of the main galleries of the queer wilderness of cast-iron and encaustic tiles known as the Metropolitan Museum, they had wandered down a passage to the room where the "Cesnola antiquities" mouldered in unvisited loneliness.

They had this melancholy retreat to themselves, and seated on the divan enclosing the central steam-radiator, they were staring silently at the glass cabinets mounted in ebonised wood which contained the recovered fragments of Ilium.

"It's odd," Madame Olenska said, "I never came here before."

"Ah, well—. Some day, I suppose, it will be a great Museum."

"Yes," she assented absently.

EDITH WHARTON, *The Age of Innocence*

Putting the House in Order

JAMES J. RORIMER *Director*

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ON THE COVER:
Cartoon by Denys Wortman (1887-1958), American. Lithograph, 6¼ x 7¼ inches. Copyright Press Publishing Co. (New York World), 1928. Gift of Ralph Pulitzer, 28.112.38

At least twice in the last forty years, I have heard serious-minded people, sympathetic to the Museum and familiar with its problems, suggest abandoning the building at Eighty-second Street and starting anew. In 1933 Solomon R. Guggenheim asked me, both as a Museum staff member and friend, what might happen if he were to make a sizable donation toward a new building for the Metropolitan in another location. We went so far as to make rough sketches, little more than doodles, of a vast new complex in the southeast corner of Central Park, opposite the Plaza Hotel. There would be a place for everything and room for everything. A central tower would contain offices, workshops, an auditorium, educational facilities, and space for all the other services required by an encyclopedic museum, and from the tower would extend tangent wings displaying the art of every major civilization. We even talked of spending thirty million dollars for such a new structure. It was not long, however, before a non-responsive statement by a weary Museum official brought our daydreaming to a close.

A decade later, during World War II, the Museum administration itself, exasperated by the deficiencies of the existing plant, also suggested abandoning the building. But Robert Moses, then Commissioner of Parks, put just as quick a stop to this plan. Speaking for the city government, he pointed out that New York had too great an investment in the building to justify starting over, and that, moreover, it could serve no other useful purpose if the Museum moved out of it. It was made clear that we had to stay where we were, and as new solutions to our difficulties have been developed, staying put was probably all for the best.

The war years, with their enforced moratorium on all improvements, brought the problems of the Museum into sharp relief. The building itself, mainly constructed before the First World War, was in many respects already outmoded. To name just a

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The model of the Parthenon in the Hall of Casts in 1910 and 1931, and outside the Junior Museum today

The Roman Court in 1939, and the same area transformed into the Restaurant

few symptomatic difficulties, electricity was supplied in the form of direct current, whereas modern motors and lights require alternating current. Protection from fire was far less than up to date: among other hazards, many of the galleries still had wood-sheathed walls and even wood-framed skylights. Although a large steam boiler occupied much space in the heart of the building, the availability of steam from city mains made it unnecessary for us to continue to provide our own heat. As attendance increased there weren't enough elevators, or stairways, or rest rooms (there never are). More serious, even though the Museum was the largest art museum in the country and one of the largest in the world, it had never been equipped for its own growth. Crowded, overlapping displays had become a hodgepodge, cumbersome for visitors and awkward for management. Not only did more room have to be found for the works of art, but also for the services attending them. During the first half century or so of operation, for instance, the Museum's collections had been guided and watched over by a relatively small curatorial staff. As the years passed, however, the largest department, Decorative Arts, had to be gradually subdivided into more manageable entities. The Department of Far Eastern Art was the first result of this dismemberment, in 1915, followed in 1932 by the Department of Near Eastern Art (recently divided in turn into Ancient Near Eastern Art and Islamic Art). In 1934 what remained was divided into three new departments: Medieval Art, American Art, and what is now known as Western European Arts. New galleries and working areas were imperative for these departments, and yet offices and shops had already spread into some of the most useful exhibition spaces.

I myself became deeply involved with these problems upon my return from the war, when the director, Francis Henry Taylor, asked me to serve as chairman of the Staff Architectural Committee. I have been grappling with them ever since, in collaboration with my colleagues, and with such architects as Robert O'Connor, former staff architect, and Geoffry Lawford, of Brown, Lawford, and Forbes. The difficulties in planning a reconstruction program for the Museum were not – and are not – confined to finding current solutions to current problems; one must take into consideration what will happen years ahead, and make present decisions with future needs in mind. Moreover, every change that is made has consequences far beyond the change itself. To close, say, a few galleries for construction means finding space elsewhere for their contents, and probably relocating several service facilities as well. The interlocking relationship of

The Morgan Wing, used as a gallery for the Morgan collection in 1918 and now as the Equestrian Court of the armor galleries

The reading room of the Library in 1920 and 1965

space and activity within the Museum makes planning all the more difficult, and scheduling, very often, a nightmare.

Five years of study preceded the first major period of reconstruction, extending from 1950 to 1955. The most important new structure was the badly needed and eminently successful Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, designed by Frank Voorhees and Ralph Walker, opened in 1954; other prominent changes included the reconstruction of the old Roman Court into a restaurant, the building of galleries linking the Morgan Wing with the northern wing on Fifth Avenue, and the installation of several period rooms. Even more significant, in its long-term consequences, was the thorough, general renovation of many of the other galleries to fit modern conditions and requirements.

During the last decade, there has been no slackening in our program. Although there have been new thoughts as our plans matured, we are still benefiting from earlier planning. Some of our recent achievements, and some of our projects for the future, represent the fruition of the long-range modernization program conceived in the years right after the war. There has, however, been one significant change in our approach. During the first stage of reconstruction, large areas of the Museum and several of the collections were simply closed to the public. But since many of our undertakings require a long time to complete, it is our present policy that, whenever possible, the collections should remain on exhibition and public services in operation. No major shutdown has been made, although it certainly would have facilitated our work to have done so. Sometimes it has been necessary to relocate: European paintings were kept on view in the Special Exhibition Galleries while their own were being air-conditioned, and the library reading rooms and offices were moved to the ground floor while new quarters were being built. In some instances – specifically the Islamic and Far East collections – it has been necessary to limit the number of visitors to the galleries. But every effort has been made to keep as much of the Museum open as possible, and this has affected both our present activities and our future plans.

To catalogue all that has been accomplished in the past ten years would be both difficult and dull. Some forty-two per cent has been added to the exhibition areas, and twenty-one per cent to the service areas. Public and staff alike have borne with admirable patience the many inconveniences involved in the reconstruction of old sections (such as the inadequately supported floors above the Egyptian galleries) and in the excavation of New York stone adjacent to Museum objects. Here let it suffice to mention in chronological order a few of our recent projects to suggest what our objectives are and how we have pursued them.

We are always striving for greater unity and continuity in the presentation of the collections, and a major step was made with the relocation of Arms and Armor in 1956. European pieces were moved to the Morgan Wing, and armor of the Eastern world was established in the newly built galleries linking the Morgan Wing and the north end of the Museum. The large gallery they vacated became the Medieval Sculpture Hall, and permitted a far more logical arrangement both of the medieval collection and Renaissance and later decorative arts. (In the early years of the Museum, incidentally, this great hall and its adjacent galleries had been devoted to casts of great sculptural and

The Library entrance in 1910 and 1965

Modern sculpture, 1907

architectural masterpieces. Some of these are on display now in the Junior Museum, but it is the hope of many that more of this collection will one day be brought back from their long "temporary" storage. Possibly they should be placed for the use of students and the general public in some suitable and accessible area outside the Museum itself.)

Those who observe the Junior Museum in action can well wonder how we managed before its completion in 1957. Its comfortable auditorium, its library scaled to young readers, its work and exhibition rooms have made a notable contribution to the life of the city and its children. From its inception, in 1941, the Junior Museum had been something of a stepchild, shifted from one set of galleries to another. The present facilities form a convenient, flexible, well-equipped nucleus for its many educational services.

The constant removal of existing collections for the exceptional or temporary was distracting to staff and public alike. Only those who experienced evacuating the Far East and Islamic galleries can appreciate what a sacrifice it was to hang in that space even so pre-eminently important an exhibition as the great loan of French tapestries in 1947. We decided that special exhibitions should no longer be held at the expense of the permanent collections, and the result was thirteen galleries constructed and reserved for

temporary shows: the Harry Payne Bingham Special Exhibition Galleries, completed in 1957.

The art of the Ancient Near East was reinstalled in 1959. The great bearded bulls that formerly loomed in the Main Hall were moved so that they could be surrounded by reliefs of the courtyard from which they had originally come. Here they form a magnificent gateway as of old, and lead to an inner room rich in related treasures.

There have been delays in our building operations. Funds, both from the city and from private sources, were not always available – indeed, the need for money in a time of rising costs is a continuing and constant concern. There have been postponements in construction. But during the past year alone we opened the Blumenthal Patio from Vélez Blanco and the Thomas J. Watson Library, splendidly equipped to serve as the Museum's nerve center. The new library wing also contains the Departments of Prints and Drawings, and provides the first permanent exhibition galleries for these forms of art. Almost simultaneously the air-conditioned and refurbished galleries for European paintings were reopened. These were followed by two permanent Far East sculpture galleries and temporary galleries of Islamic art, suggesting what is to come when more areas are prepared to receive our vast collections of Oriental art.

Among the promises for fall are a new elevator and escalator near the Main Hall and a new Room of Recent Accessions. Galleries of Western European Arts are being reinstalled one by one. Ahead lie the complete reconstruction of the Costume Institute and the rearrangement of the remaining Egyptian galleries. There are many changes – and, we hope, pleasant surprises – in store for our visitors.

Our efforts to modernize the Museum have not been limited to the use of bricks and mortar. In every new gallery, in every new installation, we have attempted to provide

Far Eastern sculpture, 1965

The Hall of Casts in 1907, and now as the Medieval Sculpture Hall

for human perceptions and human convenience. This has meant considering vistas and circulation, and providing occasional relaxation for the eye. Sometimes it has meant resisting the temptation to lower a ceiling (so convenient for modern plumbing and wiring and ventilation) and raising it instead. We have used large objects and architectural elements to provide logical boundaries between one area and another, and to serve, as it were, as intermediaries between the scale of the building and the scale of the smaller objects in it. Thus the Sardis column separates the restaurant from the Greek and Roman galleries, and the Valladolid screen makes more comprehensible the overwhelming scale of the Medieval Sculpture Hall, where very small sculptures are often as important as larger ones. And what a fine transition the beautiful sixteenth-century patio makes between the populous bustle of the galleries and the tranquility of the Library! We have endeavored, moreover, not to violate the essential integrity of the building itself. We have not broken the galleries into a maze of temporary partitions, nor covered the massive structure with pseudo-architectural decorative ensembles. All in all, we have tried to bring out the best in the Museum building – its monumentality and noble proportions – and to accept its limitations even as we have to surmount them. In this way we hope to achieve a setting for our collections that is both appropriate and enjoyable. A recent headline in *The New York Times* stated, "Very Often, There's No Place Like Home Except the Metropolitan Museum." The Museum has long tried to anticipate the needs of a growing population and a growing interest in the arts. As we look toward the future, we recognize that although the results of our activity have been well received, much thinking and work lie ahead.

Prints and drawings gallery in the new Thomas J. Watson Library

Museum in Motion

ALBERT TENEYCK GARDNER
Associate Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture

The visitor coming to The Metropolitan Museum of Art for the first time has probably heard of the richness and extent of its collections of paintings and sculpture; its archaeological collections from the ancient Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, from China, Japan, and India; and its huge and varied decorative arts collections.

To the casual observer, the Museum's displays of paintings neatly hung in rows, or its impressive European and American period rooms may give the place a deceptive air of changeless permanence, static and quiescent – a place for the placid contemplation of works of art. Yet no visitor can be unaware that the Museum is full of activity and change, and there are many aspects of the institution itself that, though they may escape the attention at first, inevitably arouse curiosity. To judge from the requests addressed to the staff, there are many things the public wants to know about the Museum – how it began and how it has developed – in addition to information about the collections.

It is sometimes forgotten that the basic purpose of most American art museums was to provide inspiration and instruction for American artists and designers, as well as education and enjoyment for the general public. For about a hundred years after the Revolution, American artists complained that they were forced to go to Europe for training and for the opportunity to study old master paintings, as well as classical and Renaissance monuments of sculpture and architecture. These complaints were voiced with increasing frequency and effect as the years passed, and finally the cry was raised in the mid-nineteenth century that art museums were a necessity for America. As a result, about twenty-five active museums were founded in various cities across the country between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the century. This altruism, however, had a practical side. By the middle of the nineteenth century, manufacturers, merchants, and educators both in England and America became aware that trained draughtsmen, designers, sculptors, and architects were not a romantic cultural luxury but an absolute economic necessity. Plans for a building and designs for a locomotive could not be made without them, nor could any type of goods that depended upon design, such as textiles, pottery, hardware, or furniture. This fact was brought forcibly to public attention by such international displays as the Crystal Palace Exposition in London in 1851, which resulted in the foundation of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Here textiles, pottery, woodwork, paintings, and sculpture were brought together for the instruction and inspiration of British artists, craftsmen, and designers. When the

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Gallery talks in 1920 and 1965

A public school group in 1924, and the Junior Museum in 1965

The newly opened Marquand gallery in 1889, and the same gallery in 1907

Metropolitan and other American art museums were founded, they followed closely upon this British precedent.

Another important factor in arousing and sustaining enthusiasm for an art museum in New York was the surprising success and popularity of the temporary art gallery assembled from New York studios and private collections for display at the Metropolitan Fair in 1864. This fair was organized to raise money for the care of soldiers wounded in the Civil War, and the committees of men and women responsible for the art gallery set an important precedent by bringing together the leading artists of New York, with certain influential political, financial, and social figures. Among the people on these committees were some who were to be the leaders in organizing and founding The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The foundation of the Museum itself was set in motion two years later in Paris, on the Fourth of July, 1866, when a group of patriotic American ladies and gentlemen gathered at the Pré Catalan to celebrate the occasion with a ball and a banquet. The principal after-dinner speaker was John Jay, an important figure in New York legal and political circles. His address that evening, partly serious, partly humorous, was on the subject of the invasion of Europe by American tourists. During the course of his remarks, he suggested that the time had come for the American people to lay the foundation of a national institution and gallery of art. Before the evening was over, a group of gentlemen from New York had formed themselves into a committee to investigate ways and means of transforming Mr. Jay's suggestion into fact, and the ultimate

result of their work, and that of later committees formed in New York, was the foundation of this Museum.

When the State of New York granted a charter to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1870, the Board of Trustees found themselves in a unique position. At that time the sole tangible possession of the Museum was its Charter – a legal document. The Museum did not own a single work of art; it had no building and practically no funds. But the Trustees had one other asset, and that was one of incalculable value: the enthusiastic concern and personal involvement of many members of the community and of the leaders of the New York art world.

Starting with the basic ideas outlined above, and with the unbounded enthusiasm of the founders and their successors, the Museum has developed over the past 95 years into a vast and complex educational organization. This complexity is reflected in the building itself. One of the first things to impress the visitor is the imposing size of the building and its sometimes baffling architectural intricacy.

The building as it stands today was erected in sections, with each part designated by a letter. The first – Wing A – was begun in 1874 and opened in 1880; it is now almost completely hidden by additions built in 1888 and 1894, and, most important, by the whole line of wings along Fifth Avenue. The central section of the Fifth Avenue façade was designed about 1894 by Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895), one of the leading architects of his time. Trained in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, he was one of the designers for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. The large scale and mixed Roman and French detail of the Main Hall seem to have been influenced by his work at Chicago. This section was opened in 1902, and the adjoining north and south wings, designed by McKim, Mead, and White, were completed over a period of years up to 1926. Thus, although the familiar Fifth Avenue façade has become one of

The opening of Three Centuries of American Painting in 1965. Photograph: Newsweek – Phil MacMullan

The Cesnola collection of vases in 1907, and the present gallery of early Greek vases

the landmarks of the city, its air of monumental calm, completion, and architectural repose is false. Since the first building plans were drawn, no year has passed when some part of the building was not in the hands of architects. Actually, the building has never been completed. If new construction was not in progress, interior reconstruction or rearrangement was under way. It might reasonably be considered as a sort of cultural coral reef, always growing and changing.

The collections, too, are always changing – growing, being refined and culled over to eliminate lesser works and substitute more important examples. Some time during 1904 or 1905, when Henry James was in this country, he came to see the Museum and wrote an interesting passage about it that was published in his book *The American Scene*. His remarks are too long and rambling to be quoted entire but toward the end of his description of the Museum he wrote: "It is a palace of art, truly, that sits there on the edge of the Park, rearing itself with a radiance, yet offering you expanses to tread. . . . From the moment the visitor takes in two or three things – first, perhaps, the scale on which, in the past, bewildering tribute has flowed in; second, the scale on which it must absolutely now flow out; and, third, the presumption created by the vivacity of these two movements for a really fertilizing stir of the ground – he sees the whole place as the field of a drama. . . . Education, clearly, was going to seat herself in these marble halls – admirably prepared for her, to all appearance – and issue her instructions without regard to cost. The obvious, the beautiful, the thrilling thing was that, without regard to cost either, they were going to be obeyed. . . .

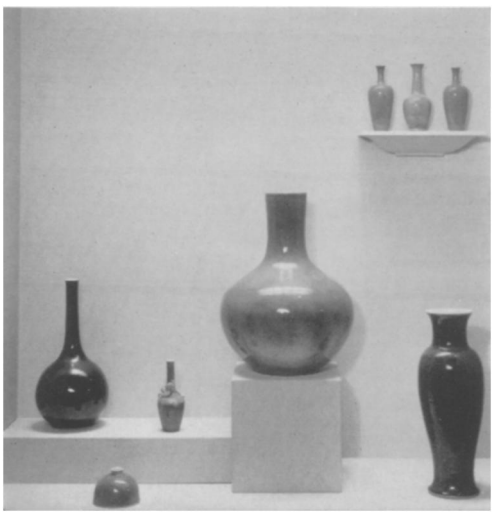
"The Museum, in short, was going to be great, and in the geniality of the life to come such sacrifices, though resembling those of the funeral-pile of Sardanapalus, dwindled to nothing."

This acute appraisal of the position of the Museum, and the prophetic remarks about Education and the necessity for weeding out the collections may have had their influence here, for shortly after his book was published ambitious educational programs were inaugurated and the collections were given their first major critical examination by experts. Many galleries were completely reinstalled, and countless objects of minor interest were relegated to storage and later disposed of at auction. This is a process that has continued, though usually in a quieter way, ever since.

The ways in which objects are displayed have also changed greatly. In the interests of clarity and comprehensibility, there has been a perceptible trend, accelerated in recent years, to concentrate and simplify the exhibits – to have more, but show less. The serried rows of all-but-indistinguishable archaeological specimens and decorative duplicates, which made many of the early galleries impressive but stupefying, have given way in the cases to a few superlative examples, carefully selected. The specimens and duplicates and lesser works are available to the specialist for study, but are not on public view.

The basic form of the institution has remained remarkably constant since its inception. The governing body of the Museum is a board of trustees. The Trustees are technically the owners of the collections of art and the funds of the Museum, which they hold in trust to accomplish the purposes of the institution, as stated in the Mu-

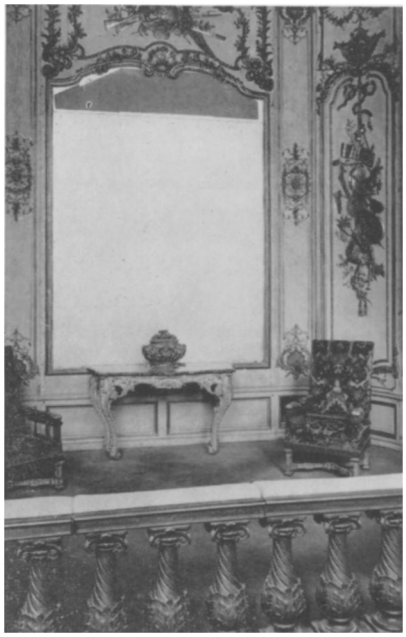
The Information and Sales Desk in 1921, and the new Bookshop



Chinese porcelain in 1908, and in a recent installation

seum's Charter. The land and building belong to the City of New York, but the art collection belongs to The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

But the broad and complicated nature of the Museum's present operations would probably astonish its founders. The Museum is actually run by the professional staff, headed by the Director, whose responsibilities, direct or delegated, range through legal and financial affairs, architectural and engineering matters, the security of the collections, the personnel, the superintendence of the building, the purchase of supplies and equipment, the management of the membership program, the production of Museum publications, the construction of new installations and special exhibitions, the care of the Museum's papers in Archives, the conservation and restoration of the works of art, and the operation of the Library, the art and book shops, the Auditorium, the educational program, and the Junior Museum. In addition to these service divisions, the Director must also deal with thirteen curatorial departments, whose staffs are actually responsible for the collections, and who attend to their care, exhibition, and study, and also attempt to increase and improve them. The staff now numbers 670 men and women who work full time.



The Louis XV alcove in 1910, and during the exhibition Period Rooms Re-occupied, 1963

The Main Hall in 1906

The complexity and highly specialized operations of the Museum may be suggested by the fact that the Museum has between 275 and 300 galleries and other display spaces; merely the housekeeping necessary to keep such large areas in presentable condition is a major operation. The Museum contains two concert and lecture halls offering constant programs of the widest variety. There are four restaurants and between six or seven hundred thousand meals are served during the course of the average year. The Museum operates two fully equipped photographic studios. There are four bookshops. There is a fully equipped laboratory for the restoration and repair of paintings, and another solely for the care of drawings and prints and other works of art made of or on paper, as well as a general laboratory occupied with the restoration, scientific study and analysis, and mounting of countless other art objects. Several curatorial departments also maintain studios for the care of their particular types of collections, among them the Armorer's Shop with its forge and anvils and a complete set of seventeenth-century

armorers' tools. Other hives of activity are to be found in the Lending Collection of slides and photographs, in constant use by lecturers. The Library is the largest of its kind in the country. The Museum even maintains a special museum for children, where specially planned exhibitions are held, dealing with serious subjects but scaled to attract the curiosity of our youngest visitors. Last year over 112,000 people attended 551 talks or formal lectures on art in the building, and about 50 concerts of serious vocal and instrumental music were performed.

One reason that this Museum – like any major American museum – is so complex is that its basic "personality," if it can be called that, is derived from various other, older social organizations. It is in fact a modern hybrid, bred with mingled characteristics of the cathedral, the royal palace, the theater, the school, the library, and, according to some critics, the department store. As the emphasis of interest or activity shifts, the character of the organization changes. Thus when the museum serves as a place of entertainment it takes on the dramatic quality of the theater, when it is used for scholarly purposes it can become an ivory tower, when its educational activities are stressed it becomes a school. For the scientist or professor it may seem to be merely a series of specimens illustrating a seductive theory, or a library of artifacts filed in chronological order. In the family of social institutions invented by man, the place of the museum is not rigidly fixed. It is pliant and can develop in many directions, or sometimes move simultaneously in several directions.

These multiple facets of the museum's personality, and the dualities of Preservation and Use, of Education and Entertainment, generate the tensions that give the institution vitality and liveliness, lacking in more staid and antique institutions devoted to single purposes.

Let us for a moment cast aside the restricting concentrations of the scholarly specialist, no matter how necessary they may be for the student, the professor, or the scientific research worker, for they usually see in the museum only fragments of their

The Heber R. Bishop Jade Room, 1909, decorated as a replica of the donor's ballroom

OF QUEEN HAT-SHEPSÛT

Egyptian sculpture, 1965 and 1912

particular corner of a specialized field. Let us look at the art museum not as a collection of tangible artifacts, but rather as an expression of ideas and feelings about man and his most important work – Art. The particular virtues of an American art museum – seen from this broad and unaccustomed point of view – may be considered the result of a democratic experiment in creating a collective work of art. In this, perhaps, lies the chief difference between American art museums and those of Europe. Most of the older American art museums were deliberately started with the idea that their prime function was the education of the people and the training of craftsmen and artists. These museums, including the Metropolitan, began merely with an idea and a legal document. They had no collections, no money, no buildings, no traditions. On the other hand, the great European museums were usually based upon collections made for the entertainment or aggrandizement of royalty; the visitor to the royal collection gained entrance by permission from above, but in America entrance was regarded as a right. The European art museum often seems a terminal point for the accumulation of the antique, but the American art museum has always been considered a point of departure for the new.

The whole vast congeries of the Museum's halls, rooms, and galleries, together with its almost innumerable works of art, are the product of many hands and minds, guided often by disparate if not frankly opposed enthusiasms. Those who influence it are not limited to the Trustees and staff who run it. There are also professional artists and their

American paintings, 1912

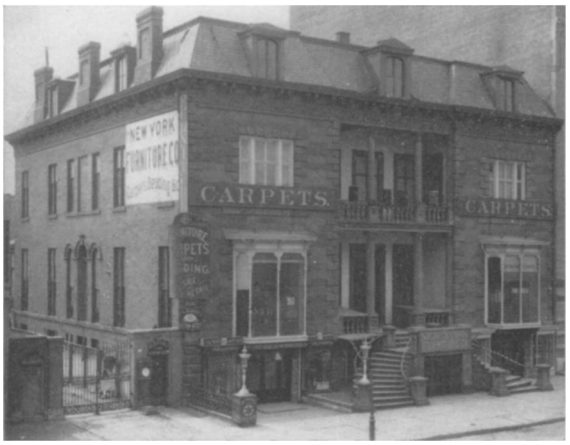
numerous amateur friends. Others include serious students of art history or of history in general, archaeologists, designers, antiquarians, collectors, craftsmen, decorators, dealers, art critics (and who isn't an art critic these days?), and connoisseurs of every degree. Each group approaches the museum with its own specialized interests in mind, and these interests seldom run in smooth parallels. Yet all of them contribute touches of form and color and meaning to the ensemble.

Since our people are drawn from many nations and races of the earth, it is appropriate that our art museum should show examples of the arts of many times and places, and that these diverse forms of expression should become naturalized as a part of the background of American art – a source, a subject of study, from which can emerge the ever-changing elements that form the art of our country. From this point of view, all American art museums and all their contents and activities assume their place as a vital part of American life.

American paintings, 1965

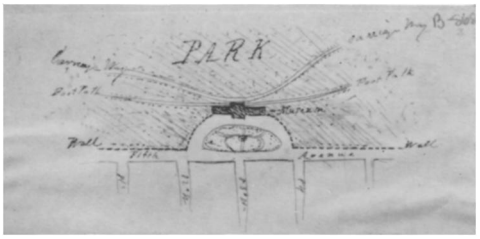
Rebus, by Robert Rauschenberg, **lent by the artist**

The Architecture of the Museum



In its earliest years, the Museum had no building of its own, and occupied rented quarters, such as the Douglas Mansion on Fourteenth Street, its home from 1873 to 1879.

But meanwhile there were plans afoot for a permanent building in Central Park. These were at first rather indefinite, as this anonymous sketch of 1869 shows.



Construction began in 1874, and by 1880 the first part of the building was completed and open. It was designed by Calvert Vaux, one of the architects of Central Park itself, in an eclectic style one observer has called "Ruskin Gothic."

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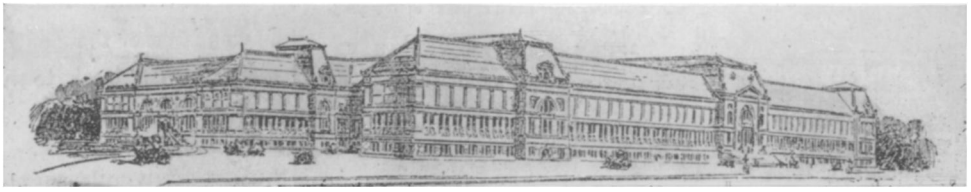
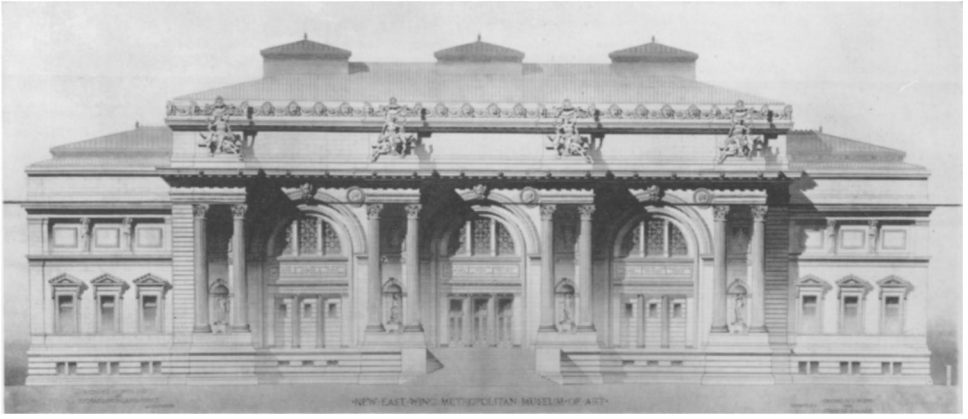
Each new wing was designated by a letter as it was built. Thus the central core "A" became sandwiched between Wing B, designed by Theodore Weston and constructed in 1888, and Wing C, designed by Arthur L. T. Tuckerman and built in 1894.



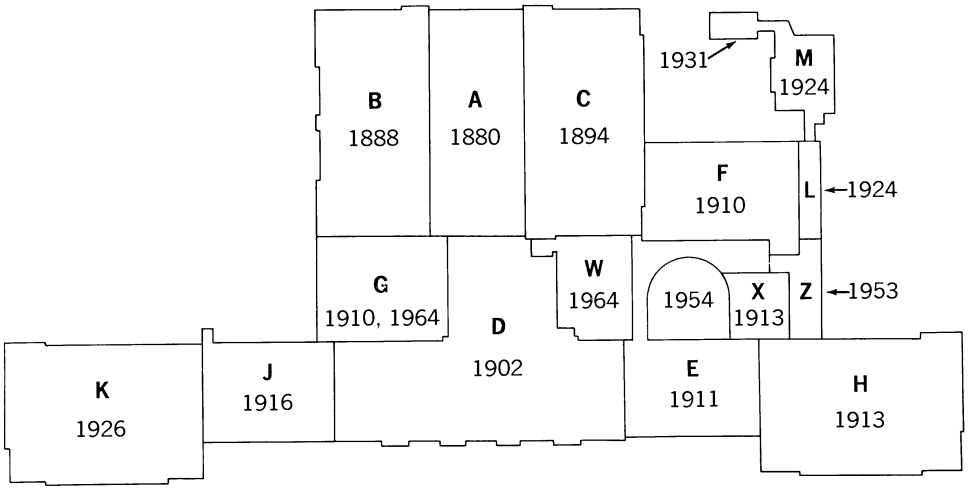
It had been planned that a series of wings in the same spirit would be built along Fifth Avenue.

But William Morris Hunt, fresh from his triumphs at the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893, had other ideas. His conception of Wing D was a grandiose neoclassical hall that (purposely) concealed the "old-fashioned" building behind.



Hunt's design proved somewhat too grand, at least in its sculptural ornament, and when it was built, in 1902, the groups intended to surmount its main pillars, representing Egyptian, Classical, Renaissance, and Modern Art, were left rough blocks.

By 1917 the façade reached its present familiar boundaries, although the interior of the last wing, K, was not finished until 1926.



This roughly T-shaped complex formed the nucleus of the building, but around it, and in its interstices, other wings have been built, such as the Library (Wing G), the Morgan Wing (F), and the American Wing (L and M).

There has been, of course, reconstruction within, at times quite extensive, as when the cast-iron arches and glass roof of the original building were replaced in 1938.

The most recent addition has been the Thomas J. Watson Library, designed by Brown, Lawford, and Forbes, and erected in 1964 to replace the old library wing. Standing between the eclectic vigor of the oldest structures and the classical grandeur of the Fifth Avenue wings, its style is severely modern.

"The Met" from the Inside

A. HYATT MAYOR *Curator of Prints*

"So you're with the Met . . . what is it like to be at the Met?" Each time we hear this question it faces us with what we might otherwise forget – that the 670 of us who work in the Metropolitan Museum form a group at least distinct enough to share a corporate slang. With the unconscious arrogance of any large family, we speak of "The Museum" (as though there were no other) and would no more think of saying "The Met" than San Franciscans would say "Frisco."

Yet how can we describe this village to which we so distinctly feel that we belong? Few groups of our size can fascinate with as bright contrasts of background, opinion, and idiom. We have come together from such different origins to do such different tasks that we can only itemize our meeting ground like the blind men generalizing about the elephant from the particular part that each feels with his hand. For the Director, the Museum is the headache of conciliating personalities, reconciling mutually exclusive demands, and organizing diversity into a common effort. For the treasurers it is the search for ways to stretch large but still limited funds to pay for services expanding at the infinite rate of life. For the conservators it is a clinic of incurables who can be cheered by discreet cosmetics, but who are all dying faster or more slowly. For the editors it is the assault of deadlines to make up this lively monthly, and the long pull of organizing complex books. For the various services of display it is the challenge to invent new yet unobtrusive ways to show works of art, it is acres of wall to paint in exact tints, and light bulbs dead at dizzy heights. For the purchasing department it is the procuring of everything from paper towels to Barcelona chairs. For the night watch it is a prowl along the catwalks under the dimming skylights, and then a plunge into the night outdoors, whatever the weather. For office service it is the mail of a small township to stamp for sending out and distribute when coming in. Most conspicuously of all, for the attendants it is a swirling cataract of crowds who need advice, directions, and control, requiring a traffic policeman's nerves, a politician's memory for people, and, at times, the insight of a psychiatrist. The curator's point of view is the only one that I can define from something closer than hearsay. Each curator, as he peers out from behind his show window, sees nothing but lacks, gaps, and desiderata. The shopping list of necessities to improve the collection sometimes obsesses him more than the inventory of treasures already here.

Unlike teachers of the history of art, who reassemble the world in evolutionary sequences of lantern slides, our outlook on art is dominated – perhaps warped – by the things that happen to be in the building. Works of art held in the hand, like white

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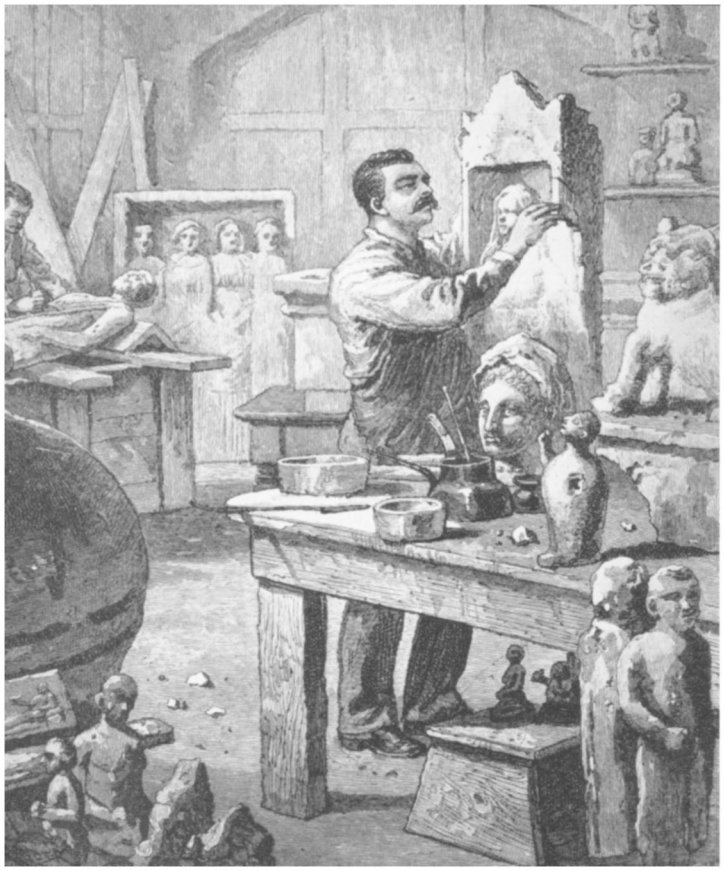
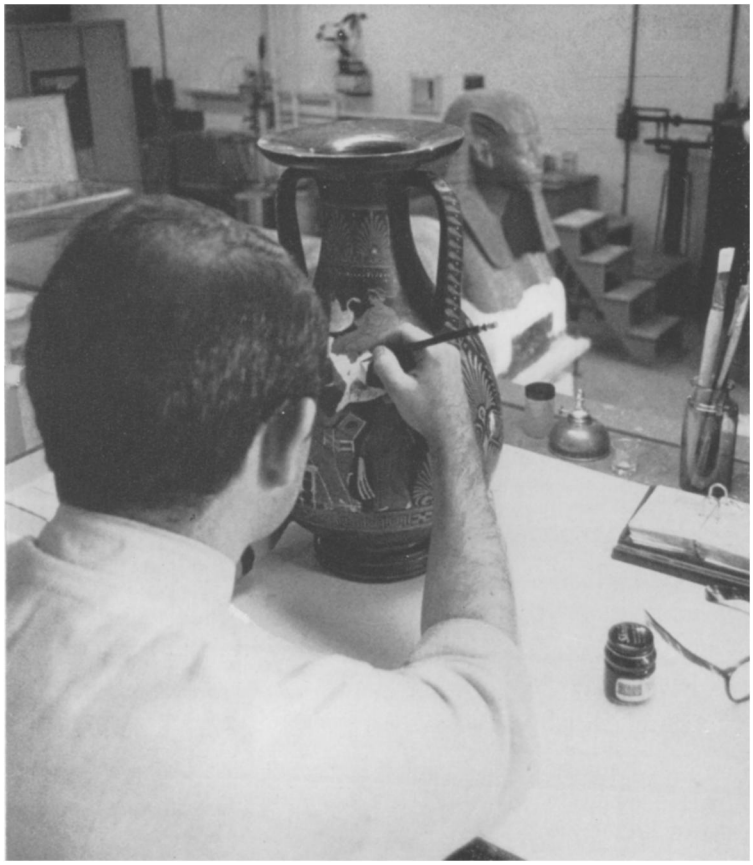


Display
1922, 1965



Conservation
1880, 1922, 1965

mice or fruit flies in a laboratory, humble any observer with a complexity beyond his knowledge. By stubbing our toes against questions that we cannot answer, we have learned, if not always humility, then at least the wisdom of hesitancy. Unlike businessmen, we can share ideas and information without impoverishing ourselves. Discussions are made even franker and freer by the social discipline of frequently lunching together in the building's four restaurants. Though the talk at the lunches flashes only occasionally into brilliance, it always stimulates by its uniqueness. As in a Platonic dialogue, casual greetings evolve into a theme that develops in ways that will never occur again. By sharing these moments of the exhilarating waste of life we come to accept each other with a better grace than most groups. No two members of the staff have ever refused to greet if they met in a corridor, and what malice there is, is mostly ornamental.

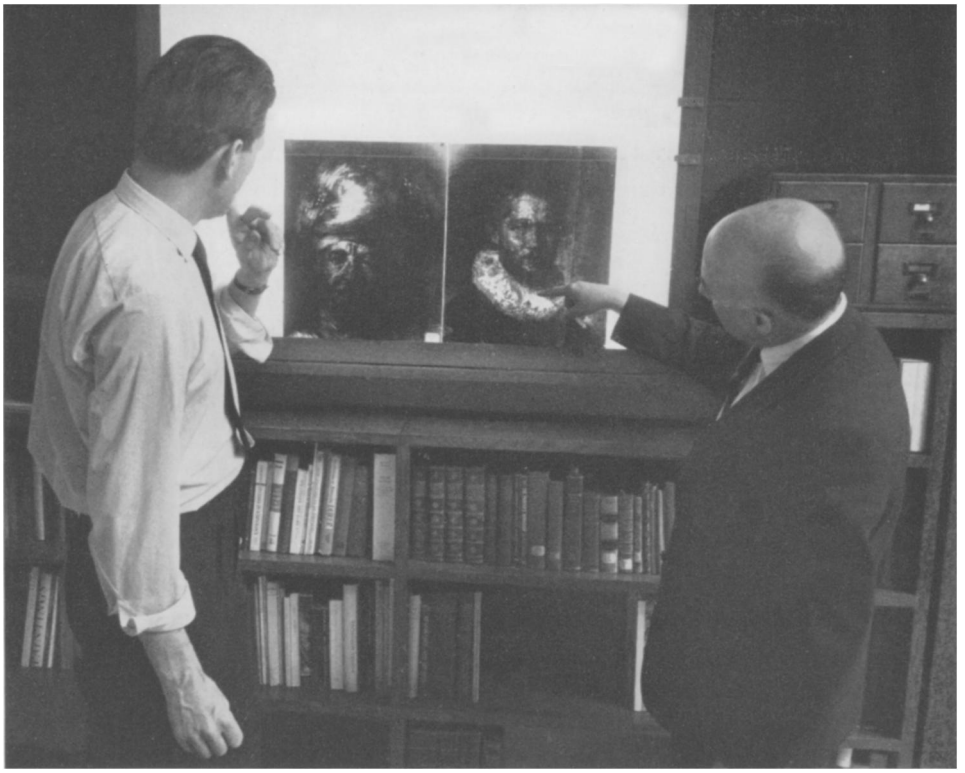
For all our diversity, the strength of the organization has bent even the toughest of us to a common service. As one prized advantage of this, we have always had some trustees who have shared in the thinking and doing of the curators through an equality of knowledge. Our second president, Henry G. Marquand, probably knew more about paintings than any American curator of the 1890s, and the American Wing was the intelligent creation of a later president, Robert W. de Forest, and our trustee R.T.H. Halsey. "R.T.H.," as my elders called him, was the only survivor of heroic times who seemed comfortable to anyone so junior as I. When this cultivated Baltimorean talked with a Southern mellowness articulated by Northern consonants, he sounded as contented as though he were settling down to a luncheon with green terrapin soup. Weighing this world for what it is worth, he questioned all grandmothers' tales about American silver and furniture in order to start discovering their history through documents. No man did more to establish a reliable study of our decorative arts.

Our directors have been as varied as our trustees. The one with the most romantic curatorial destiny was perhaps Herbert Winlock, who, as a small boy, knew that he had to be an Egyptologist when he embalmed a mouse and coffined it in a nest of tiny carved sarcophagi. His massive head was weatherbeaten like a Roman proconsul's, and when he talked about Egypt – the picaresque quips of the fellaheen, the first flashlight glimpse into a tomb, the sunsets on the sands – he became a poet of nostalgia.

Some curators have brought unexpected talents to their work. I had known Preston Remington, our curator of decorative arts, for several years before I realized that he was trained as an architect. This I discovered in 1935, when he was preparing a comprehensive exhibition of eighteenth-century French painting, sculpture, and decoration. He spent some fine spring mornings in the print department turning the leaves of our great eighteenth-century folios on architecture, while he told us who had said what during lunches at the Plaza or the Colony. Now and then he would jot down a detail so negligently as to imply that his real concern was to amuse us with the doings of his elegant friends. Yet a few days later, when he sailed for France to borrow his show, he left behind him plans for a beautiful oval gallery so specific that the whole intricate carpentry fell exactly into place during his absence. He calculated his proportions so perfectly that an installation that he intended for one exhibition only has served for any number of them over the past thirty years.

Installing an Exhibition

The Armorer's Shop



When I first came to the Museum there were still people who remembered the very founders. The dominant ghost was General Cesnola's, the Italian soldier of fortune who won his rank in our Civil War, excavated Cyprus while acting as American consul, sold his collection of antiquities to us, and came along with it as our first director. He established the Museum's restaurant with an Italian chef, a bar of ebonized moldings and faceted mirrors, and wines so delicate that people traveled all the way uptown just to lunch. Since the General liked to find everybody alert and on the job, his shoes had steel heels that could be heard several galleries away. When his military tidiness was offended by the headless bodies and bodiless heads among the sculpture that he had dug up, he set any head on any body that it would approximately fit, plastering up the chinks in the necks with a paste of lime-dust and honey. The Cypriot gods and goddesses endured the mixture all winter, but when the windows were opened in summer they put on collars of flies.

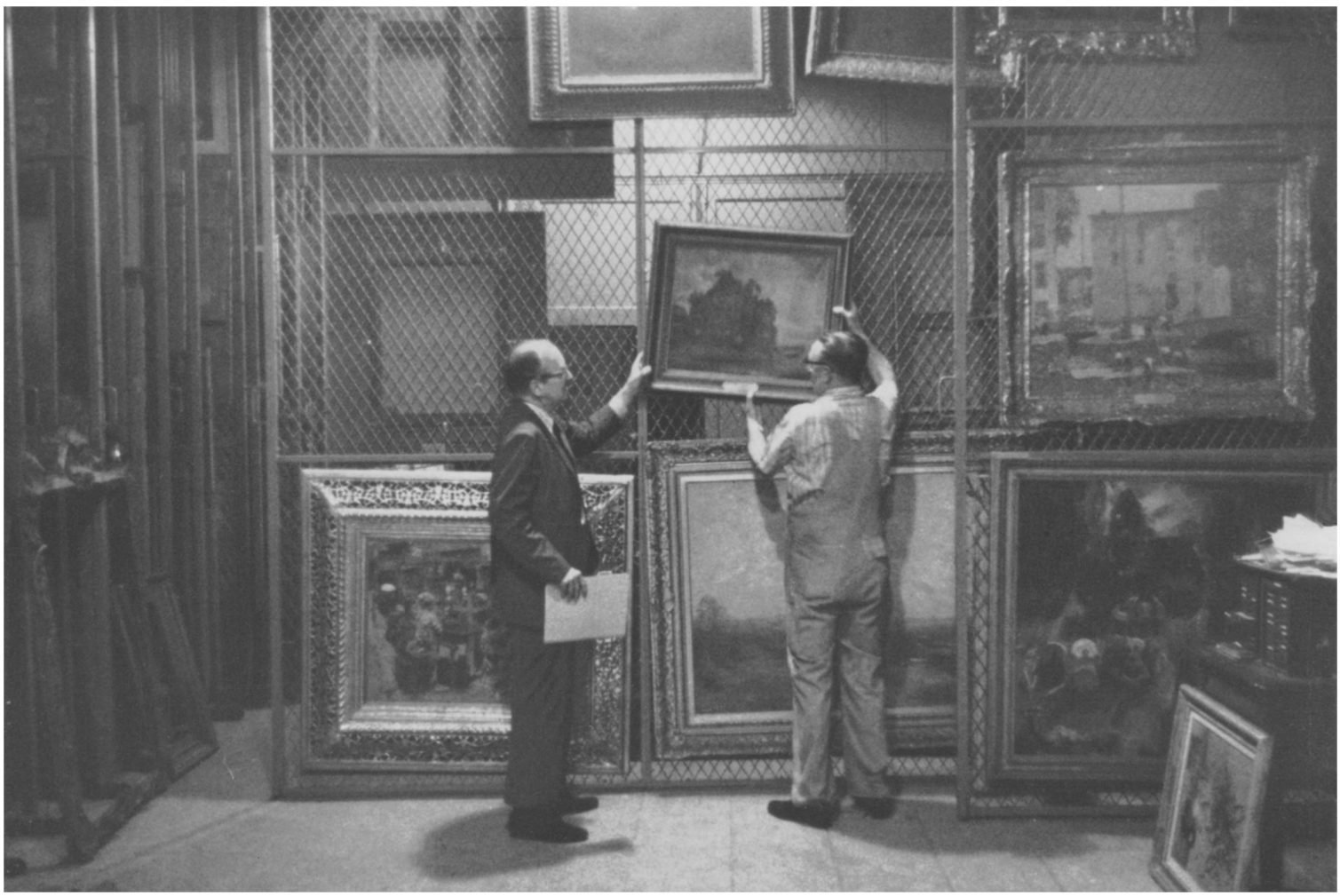
All this amusement of personal intimacy came quite late in my life. During my boyhood and early youth, the Museum was not people but things. I cannot remember when I first entered the building, but by my early teens I was already rambling through the galleries as though they were my own back yard, taking all for granted as I used – misused – the treasures that had become familiar. I spent days in the paintings galleries without ever noticing a painting in my intentness to study the frames for motifs simple enough to carve at home. The only pictures that then talked to me were the Byzantine and Rhenish enamels that J. P. Morgan had recently given to the public. At night I could still see their clarity of sard and sapphire, their liquid calligraphy of gold, their

hieratic sideways glance. But being an ignorant boy who assumed that no local museum could be anything but provincial, I promised myself the prospect of some day visiting the famous European collections to wallow in a glut of the Real Thing. When I finally traveled, I judged all museums by the quality of their enamels, and found them wanting. Then, as I was about to give up my search, in the Galerie d'Apollon at the Louvre, I found at last a pair of golden roundels inhabited by those princely jeweled saints of Byzantium that I had learned to love. The label said *Don de M. J. P. Morgan* – who had separated the two from the nine at home.

In those remote days before the American Wing, my only impression of the staff came one quiet morning when I was making my way through the Bolles collection of early American furniture, then crammed into a basement gallery like a warehouse. In the silence of the dim room a voice drifted down from the transom over a tall door, a voice resonant with wisdom, pitched deep in authority. "This is Bashford Dean." I never saw our first curator of armor, who also curated fishes across the park, but when I heard those balanced tones, I said to myself, "I have heard the Voice of the Met."

As I go about my errands today, does some adolescent perhaps glance at me as though I, in turn, had inherited the ages?

Storeroom



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